

AFRICAN WORLDS

200 160

538 a cow, for example. In a text given by Westermann¹ the hare is taught and
 [825] saved by *juok*. The hare (or rabbit) is said by Hofmayr to be the favourite
 figure in many Shilluk animal stories, and the stories quoted by him and by
 [177] Westermann show how clever, and how lucky, the hare is. A story given by
 Hofmayr² about the hare's eating young crocodiles appears in a different
 form in Westermann,³ where this act is attributed to Dak, the clever son
 of Nyikang. The moral of these stories is that astuteness and trickery, like
 knowledge, pay, and it seems as though unusual intelligence, ingenuity,
 and luck associate those who possess them with the divine intelligence,
 and the success for which God is the Shilluk explanation. Hofmayr gives
 as a translation for the Shilluk expression *juoga tarr*, 'that which I have
 from the highest being, my soul, my lot, luck, my other self, is favourable
 to me'.⁴ The large number of Shilluk riddles is an indication of the high
 value set on cleverness and ingenuity, and it is to be expected that these
 [182] qualities, held up for admiration in their stories and in their daily life,
 [643] should be ideally associated with Nyikang and their kings.

643 The kings, and all others inspired by *juok*, are sacred because they mani-
 787 fest divine energy and knowledge, and they do so by being strong, cunning,
 786 and successful, as well as by appearing to be in closer touch with the supra-
 human than are ordinary men. The signs of this closer communion are dreams

and 'hysterical' possession, or at least some outward sign of contact with a
 superior power. Examples of behaviour showing this are numerous. In the
 installation ceremonies of 1943, when the king-elect was set on the sacred
 stool of Nyikang at a climax in the ceremony, we are told that 'the *roth*
 (king) was seized with a trembling fit at the critical moment, and certainly
 he appeared to be in a dazed condition immediately afterwards'.⁵ This

[77] form of behaviour is a common sign of possession by a power greater than
 human among other Nilotic peoples. Though there was some reference

643 in these ceremonies to the king as the source of justice, and to the ethical
 qualities necessary in a ruler, they were clearly distinct from the central re-
 ligious significance of the ceremonies. So also, though we find many refer-

776 ences in Shilluk texts to God as the helper of the poor and the final court
 of appeal in trouble, his activity in these respects is not to be taken as an
 indication that he is only or primarily an apotheosis of ethical virtue. Many

[782] of the hymns to Nyikang and God are laments that the land is being de-
 stroyed because they are not helping, and we are told that when their
 prayers are not answered, the Shilluk may curse Nyikang for not assisting
 them.⁶ A Shilluk proverb says that 'God threads good and evil men on a
 single string', suggesting that, in some circumstances at least, God does not
 seem to reward virtue and punish vice.⁷ In other texts he is shown as the
 ultimate sanction for customary ethical behaviour, as a helper, and as a

¹ 1912, p. 180.² Op. cit., 155.³ Howell and Thomson, 1946, p. 62.⁴ Hofmayr, 1925, p. 376.⁵ 1925, p. 376.⁶ Op. cit., p. 103.⁷ Oyster, 1918 (ii), p. 285.